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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL MAKOVSKY/GUREVICH DISCUSS ELECTIONS, VIEW
OF THE U.S. IN ISTANBUL

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In separate July 7 meetings, House Committee on Foreign Affairs (HCFA) Senior Staff Members Alan Makovsky and Gene Gurevich discussed the July 22 parliamentary elections, the possibility of a cross-border operation (CBO) into northern Iraq, and the effects of a possible U.S. Armenian Genocide Resolution (AGR) on U.S.-Turkish relations with Milliyet newspaper columnist Sami Kohen and editor Sedat Ergin. Both journalists warned that there is public pressure to launch a CBO into northern Iraq, but they believed that such an operation would not be launched during the election cycle. They also cautioned against AGR passage and suggested that the Turkish response would be severe, including possible suspension of U.S. use of Incirlik airbase and a move by Turkey to seek other allies that would weaken the country's traditional Western-orientation. Staffdel also met with former Istanbul Mayor Bedrettin Dalan who charged the USG with supporting the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the terrorist PKK. END SUMMARY

JULY 22 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

¶2. (SBU) Kohen told Makovsky and Gurevich that the July 22 parliamentary elections are being held properly and orderly in an atmosphere of freedom. He said that no one has complained that they are not free elections and that many parties are participating, including the small Communist Party. Makovsky added, and Kohen agreed, that there is no comparison to other elections in the region.

¶3. (SBU) Kohen explained that although secularism is an issue currently preoccupying intellectuals, the economy is the "bread and butter issue" that affects the man-on-the-street. He noted that AKP will benefit because people are fed up with the high cost of living and with corruption; under AKP's leadership there have been quantifiable improvements, including a lower rate of unemployment, a higher standard of living, and a more controlled rate of inflation.

¶4. (SBU) Both Kohen and Ergin focused on the parties likely to pass the ten percent threshold of national votes needed to enter parliament, including AKP, the Republican People's Party (CHP), and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Kohen said that AKP will not win as many seats as they currently hold, but that they will most likely still be able to form a single-party government. He noted that although the CHP's

vote strength may increase, they will be "unable to win due to party leader Deniz Baykal's failures."

¶15. (SBU) Kohen cautioned that while both the CHP and the AKP have moved towards the center and many parties are running unexpected candidates, the basic ideologies of the parties have not changed. Using the example of former ambassador and current MHP candidate Gunduz Aktan, he said that Aktan would either have to accept the MHP platform or resign because the party will ultimately remain the same. Kohen also noted that if the Kurdish independent candidates get twenty seats in the new parliament, they can form a parliamentary group, which could then join a coalition. Erdogan, when when commenting on the possibility of the AKP accepting such a coalition, caused a huge controversy by stating, "if those independents are committed to the constitution, including the territorial integrity of Turkey, then I'm ready to have anyone join our government."

¶16. (SBU) Ergin also commented on the new candidates for parliament, noting Erdogan "purged" about 150 current MPs he viewed as too difficult to control from the party list for the upcoming elections. Ergin said that the majority of these members were those who voted against the March 1 decree, which would have allowed coalition forces to open a northern front into Iraq through Turkey.

¶17. (SBU) Kohen briefly discussed the referendum on constitutional amendments that would allow for popular election of the president. Kohen said that the AKP could propose a compromise candidate for president, but that "compromise is an alien concept in Turkish politics, otherwise it wouldn't have come to early elections". He said that if AKP wants to drag out the process, they can use the referendum as an excuse and let the presidential election

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wait until after the referendum.

POSSIBILITIES OF A CROSS-BORDER OPERATION INTO NORTHERN IRAQ

¶18. (SBU) While he "wouldn't bet on anything", Kohen suspects Turkey will not go into Iraq because despite public pressure, political pressure, and potential embarrassment for FM Abdullah Gul and the Foreign Ministry, the government is quite conscious of the dangers of a CBO. He said that although Erdogan and Gul have been paying increasing lip service to the possibility of an operation, Gul recalled the Ottoman defeat by the Russians at Sarikamis, which lead to the deaths of many Ottoman soldiers because of poor timing and hasty planning. Kohen said that this comparison seemed to suggest an awareness of the difficulties of launching an attack.

¶19. (SBU) If Turkey carries out a CBO, Kohen said the government and the military must decide whether to just try to eliminate the PKK, or whether to also target Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechervan Idris Barzani. Makovsky said that a senior MFA official likened Barzani to Abdullah Ocalan, the recently arrested founder of the PKK. Kohen responded that there are people who believe that Turkey needs to strike a blow to the Kurdish leadership to remind people that Turkey "should not be played with" and to make Kurds more cooperative in the future. He, however, dismissed an extensive operation as an option and said that getting rid of Barzani would not be easy and Turkish involvement could become similar to U.S. involvement in Iraq. He also said that an extended attack would provoke Kurds in Turkey's southeast to become more antagonistic because there is already sympathy for Barzani. He reassured Makovsky and Gurevich that no one in power claims that Turkey should try to occupy Mosul or Kirkuk. Many people supporting the operation have compared its unilateral nature to Ataturk's War of Independence, but that this is no longer the 1920s and warfare has changed. Instead, he said Turkey could engage in

a short-time, limited operation that would satisfy Turkish public opinion and not unduly anger either Washington or Brussels.

¶10. (SBU) A CBO would particularly impact relations with the European Union, Kohen noted. Makovsky added that EU Commissioner for Enlargement Ollie Rehn told him that if Turkey did launch an attack on northern Iraq, the EU would ask for a "time out" on Turkey's accession talks. Kohen commented that with U.S. relations Turkey can always hope for highs and lows, but if talks are suspended with the EU, they will not be easy to resume, given the increasing disinterest of many EU members in Turkey's candidacy.

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE RESOLUTION

¶11. (SBU) Both Kohen and Ergin spoke forcefully about the negative effects of an AGR being passed. Although Makovsky assured them that Congress was very conscious of the effect such a resolution would have on the July 22 elections, he also warned that both the Speaker and the Majority Leader are committed to seeing the resolution reach the floor in the House of Representatives. Kohen said that even if an AGR were only passed in the House, that would be damaging enough and a "severe blow" to U.S.-Turkish relations. He said that the passage of an AGR immediately after the elections would put pressure on AKP, in an atmosphere that is already charged because of perceived inaction on northern Iraq and the likely increased strength of the opposition. He said that Erdogan cannot remain inactive with regard to tension with the USG over northern Iraq and an AGR. Ergin echoed Kohen's statements, noting that public repercussions to an AGR would be severe and citing an increasing sense of nationalism among many Turks. When Makovsky asked about possible closure of the U.S. airbase in Incirlik, Ergin said that he would write an editorial openly encouraging the government to suspend use of the base until further assessment could be made. If the U.S. Congress passed an AGR, "(Turkey) should also do something to hurt (the U.S.). There must be a time. We should get even."

LOOKING ELSEWHERE FOR ALLIES: A POSSIBLE SHIFT IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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¶12. (SBU) Kohen and Ergin emphasized that the current Turkish frustration with U.S. reactions to the possibility of a CBO and the AGR could lead to a shift in Turkey's western orientation. Both said that in spite of assertions by some U.S. politicians, Turkey no longer needs the U.S. in the same way it did in the 1980s and 1990s, during the era of Soviet threats and economic instability. The current attitude is less pro-Western than before, but AKP has managed to maintain it, even with increasing friction over issues relating to terrorism. Recently, however, high-level officials have said that if U.S.-Turkish relations sour, Turkey would have a wide-spectrum of potential allies, including Iran, India, and China. While Kohen acknowledged that some of these options could be seen as "added values," they should never be substituted for current relationships, particularly with respect to world vision and Turkey's western orientation. The U.S. is absolutely more influential than the EU, Kohen confirmed. While Turkey would be disappointed if left by the EU, it has bilateral relations with member countries, so there would be no shift in general foreign policy. With the U.S., Kohen said, the response would be much more dramatic.

UNEXPECTED MEETING WITH BEDRETTIN DALAN

¶13. (C) Expecting to meet retired General Edip Baser, staffdel instead was ushered into Yeditepe University Trustee

Board Chairman Bedrettin Dalan's office, along with General Baser, where Dalan led the conversation. Dalan warmed to his two points quickly, introducing the first by noting his goal at Yeditepe University is to create "a modern, secular generation that will oppose AKP - a narrow-minded party." The Turkish public is intensely patient; they will wait until the very end but then, they will react swiftly and certainly.

AKP is trying to fight "the system" but we know the Turkish public will react without hesitation and with conviction at the right time to defeat this plague. This is why my friends and I feel very confident. Meanwhile, foreign investors are seeing a false paradise. The deficit has mushroomed five times larger than when AKP took office. It is time for the country to face this; there will be a change after the elections.

¶14. (C) Dalan said he "knows" the USG is supporting the AKP, despite the "official" answer that the U.S. works with the government in power. All the intellectuals in the country believe this. This is the reason over 90% of Turks are against the U.S. today - official U.S. support for AKP. "If America supports the fundamentalists, we will not be pro-American. If this continues, you'll lose the support of the Turkish people completely." Asked for examples, Dalan said former U.S. Ambassador Robert Pearson, before the 2002 general election, systematically approached top Turkish businessmen enlisting support for AKP. His message: the U.S. supports AKP and the U.S. wants to see you supporting AKP, too. Makovsky said that knowing Ambassador Pearson, he found this very hard to believe.

¶15. (S) Turks also perceive the U.S. as supporting the PKK, charged Dalan. Just look at the three PKK escapees quoted widely in the local press in early July who claimed they witnessed the transfer of heavy arms from Americans directly to PKK camps on Kandil mountain. He went on, accusing U.S. military personnel of visiting the PKK. "We've heard this from (Stephen) Hadley and General Ralston. Our own intelligence tells us this." Separately, Baser told staffdel that Turkish intelligence supplied intelligence (video) of American military personnel meeting with PKK representatives. Pressed by Makovsky, Baser backtracked a bit and said that it had perhaps been northern Iraqi personnel meeting with PKK representatives. Makovsky told Dalan he didn't believe for one second the U.S. supports the PKK and outlined why. Dalan said Barzani is a bully threatening Turkey. "Someone should shut his mouth," said Dalan. Finally, he complained that a huge American military base was being constructed in northern Iraq to diminish Turkey's importance.

¶16. (C) Comment. The meetings at Milliyet newspaper and Yeditepe University underscored the rising tension in U.S.-Turkish relations surrounding a possible CBO into northern Iraq and a potential AGR. Kohen, Ergin and Dalan's remarks make clear that these issues are viewed within Turkey as both sensitive and important within Turkey and continued disagreements with the U.S. government could lead to a reversal in the pro-Western attitude of the Turkish population and government. Whatever else they indicate,

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Dalan's comments reflect the extreme exasperation of the secular elites with continued AKP popularity and concomitant suspicion that outside forces must be supporting the party. End comment.

JONES